



HOW WALES IS RUN NOW AND IN THE FUTURE

There are on-going debates in Wales about how the country should be run. These reflect different views on the situation today and give different options for the future.

Up until 1999, most domestic policy for Wales – as for Scotland and Northern Ireland - was decided by a Secretary of State who was a member of the UK Government Cabinet and accountable to the Westminster Parliament. In 1999, a National Assembly for Wales was established, a regional government directly elected by the people of Wales. This was part of a UK-wide programme of devolution introduced by the Labour Party, which also saw the creation of a parliament in Scotland and an assembly in Northern Ireland. These bodies were given a range of policy responsibilities in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, but without changing the ultimate sovereignty of the United Kingdom Parliament.

Wales' constitutional arrangements have evolved quite significantly since 1999. Several Commissions have been established to examine the arrangements for governing Wales: these have considered whether Wales should be

given decision-making and legislative powers in a larger number of policy areas and how to improve the relationship between the devolved and UK political institutions. As a result, over the years the National Assembly for Wales has gained new powers to make laws in devolved policy areas, to raise taxes and to change how it is elected. The National Assembly for Wales changed its name to Senedd Cymru (the Welsh Parliament) in 2020.

By today, the Welsh Government is responsible for proposing policies in areas including health, education, language and culture, environment and economy and it can collect some taxes. Senedd Cymru makes laws and holds the government to account. Other decisions affecting people living in Wales are taken by the UK Government and the Houses of Parliament in Westminster. These include defence, pensions, benefits, justice and policing, broadcasting and most taxes.

But these changes have not put an end to discussions about how Wales should be run. Recent events – such as Brexit, and the Covid-19 pandemic – have placed growing pressures on, and revealed problems with, the functioning of the Welsh devolution settlement. These developments became a backdrop for some changes in public opinion as various surveys indicated greater support for independence in Wales.

In 2021, a new [Independent Commission on Wales' Constitutional Future](#) was created to look at different ways of running Wales. The Commission is in the process of gathering the views of the people of Wales on how Wales should be governed in future, and will make its final recommendations by the end of 2023. The [key options](#) being explored by the Commission are:

OPTION 1: Entrenched devolution: This would give greater protection to the Senedd's powers, and could also mean the transfer of new policy responsibilities to Wales.

OPTION 2: A federal structure: This would mean making clearer who is responsible for which policies, either the UK parliament or devolved institutions in Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and England. It would also clarify how the devolved institutions can feed into policy decisions that affect the UK as a whole.

OPTION 3: Independence: Under this option, Wales would become a sovereign state that would be able to apply for full membership of the United Nations and other international organisations.

Materials produced as part of the 'Everyday Politics of Independence'
project as part of the Centre for Welsh Politics and Society ESRC funded
WISERD/Civil Society Research Centre.

